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BAMS UAS program advances with launch of first radar flight

The U.S. Navy completed the first flight of the Multi-Function Active Sensor (MFAS) radar system, the primary sensor on the MQ-4C Broad Area Maritime Surveillance Unmanned Aircraft System (BAMS), on Dec. 16 on a Northrop Grumman surrogate Gulfstream aircraft at a California test site. The MQ-4C BAMS program is on track to deliver initial operating capability to the fleet by fiscal 2015. (Photo courtesy of Northrop Grumman)

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. — Marking significant advancement in its maritime surveillance program, the U.S. Navy recently began test flights on a radar system destined for an unmanned aircraft.

The Navy completed the first flight of the Multi-Function Active Sensor (MFAS) radar system, the primary sensor on the MQ-4C Broad Area Maritime Surveillance Unmanned Aircraft System.

The Dec. 16 two-hour inaugural flight was conducted on a Northrop Grumman surrogate Gulfstream aircraft at a California test site. This was the first in a series of MFAS test flights scheduled through October as the program matures. Thirty test-bed aircraft flights for early MFAS trials are planned. The tests will focus on maturing the performance of maritime surface surveillance modes of the radar

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“The MFAS radar system’s ability to detect, classify and track multiple targets simultaneously will make it a highly capable sensor for the Fleet,” said Patrick Ellis, BAMS UAS mission systems lead. “The information we will be able to capture using this radar system was something we could only imagine not too long ago. Seeing the system in action provides additional proof that this asset will be invaluable to our warfighters.”

The MFAS is a full 360-degree Actively Electronically Scanned Array radar system designed to provide persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) coverage. It accomplishes this at long ranges in both open ocean and regions close to shore.

“This milestone is a significant step forward for the program,” Ellis said. “The road leading to MFAS first flight included challenges, but seeing this physical proof in our preparation for the upcoming test and evaluation phase of the program brings a new boost of energy and excitement to the team.”

Initial MFAS radar testing took place in early 2011 to verify operation of the signal transmission path and to complete health and safety checks.

The MQ-4C BAMS program is on track to deliver initial operating capability to the fleet by fiscal 2015, including a scheduled first flight this year. BAMS will operate as an adjunct to the P-8A Poseidon and is a key piece of the overall replacement strategy for the P-3C Orion.